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LETTER

TO A

Member of Parliament

FROM A

COUNTRY GENTLEMAN,

CONCERNING

The Growth of the WOOLL, and the Nature
of the WOOLLEN TRADE in IRELAND;
wherein such a Method is proposed for pre-
venting the Clandestine Exportation of those
Commodities, as will be equally beneficial
to both KINGDOMS.

Hiberno Britannus



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L E T T E R

To a MEMBER of

PARLIAMENT.

S I R,



INCE the clandestine trade of running wool and woollen goods from *Ireland* to places abroad, has lately made a great noise, and the parliaments of *Britain* and *Ireland* have thought it necessary to consider whether any more effectual laws can be made, or other methods found out to prevent this clandestine trade; I think it my duty, at so critical a juncture, being a well-wisher to the joint interest of both kingdoms, to lay my thoughts before you, and, in as concise a manner as I can, to offer you some reasons, which weigh with me, to shew, that tho' the quantity of wool, and woollen and bay yarn, sent into *England* at present, be less than it formerly was, and is daily decreasing; yet it is not occasion'd from a greater quantity of wool or woollen manufactures being run abroad at this time, but from other causes; and since I have reason to believe that *England* will always prohibit our woollen trade abroad, I will humbly offer, what I think the most effectual and prudent method to prevent it, and which, at the same time, will be perfectly consistent with the good of both kingdoms.

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IN order to this I must look a little back, and observe the different situation of affairs in *Ireland*, and the different circumstances it is now in, from what it was in before the late happy revolution, both in respect to its wealth and number of inhabitants, and also in respect to their employment.

THE wool, and woollen yarn enter'd for *England* in 1687, was 285125 stones, each containing 16 pounds; in 1698, 377520 such stones were exported from hence; and in 1727, at a medium of 8 years, there were 227049 stones of wool, &c. annually exported: but from lady-day 1725 to lady-day 1731, at a medium of 6 years, there have been annually exported but 148002 stones of wool and yarn.

THE number of persons in *Ireland* in 1622 were computed at 1,100,000; and in 1684 they were again computed at 1,200,000.

After the reduction of *Ireland* the numbers were lessen'd; and by Mr. *South's* account, did not in 1695 exceed 1,040,000. In the year 1725 they were again, at a low estimate, computed at 1,670,000.

From the time of the great devastation made in *Ireland* by the rebellion in 1641, until after the restoration in 1660, few, except the debenturers, durst venture to come over to reside in this kingdom; and the encouragement given to papists towards the end of king *Charles* the II^{d's} reign, from the hopes they had of a popish successor, was a discouragement at that time to protestants coming over to reside in *Ireland*.

THUS for want of a sufficient number of people, and because those we had were very indolent by reason of the cheapness of land and provisions, almost all our lands were employ'd in grazing cattle and sheep; this necessarily occasion'd the exportation of a great quantity of wool annually into *England*; for a small quantity of corn was sufficient to feed our people at home. As our numbers increased to upwards of 1,200,000 in 1687, it is probable less wool was then exported, than from the restoration to that time, by our having more lands under tillage to maintain our increasing numbers; and consequently less land would be under sheep: more wool was also us'd at home for our own consumption, which would somewhat lessen the quantity exported.

AFTER the revolution, our numbers being again lessen'd

lessen'd about one fifth, it was natural for gentlemen to do their utmost to increase their sheep, their lands then lying waste: this occasion'd the increase of our wool in 1698; so that besides what we manufactur'd at home, we exported about 93000 stone more than in 1687.

By the same way of reasoning; our numbers increasing between 1698 to 1725, from less than 1,100,000 to about 1,670,000, which is about half as many more as was then in the kingdom; by this, and the increase of our linnens and other manufactures since that time, which have brought us in much more wealth, we have not only employ'd about half as much more of our lands in tillage to feed our people, but by the increase of luxury have spent more in proportion in house-keeping: this would consequently lessen our sheep-walks, and the number of sheep preserv'd for their wool, by turning more lands to tillage, and feeding black cattle for our sustenance, and breeding more horses to till our ground, and also consuming more sheep in our market: Besides, the wool consum'd at home in cloathing above 570,000 persons more than in 1698, and those cloath'd at greater expence and with greater variety than formerly, must greatly lessen the exports of our wool and yarn to *England*.

FROM this way of reasoning it is evident that the decrease of the wool and yarn exported to *England* does not proceed from there being a greater quantity run abroad at this time, but from our sheep-walks being lessen'd by the increase of our numbers, and employing more of our land in tillage, and in keeping more horses upon that account, in feeding black cattle, and in daries, by consuming more sheep and wool at home to feed and cloath us.

FROM this we may also observe how wisely *England* acted when it encourag'd the establishment of the linnen and hempen manufactures in this kingdom: this *England* knew would be the only effectual way to employ our poor, and prevent the increase of our wool. Let us observe how few sheep there are in the linnen countries, in respect of what there were formerly when our numbers were fewer, and those not employ'd: To do this effectually, I will take a short view of the several provinces and counties in this kingdom, and observe whether the sheep have not been, and are not

not now annually decreasing as our numbers increase and are properly employ'd.

To begin with *Ulster*, where our linnen-manufacture is spread almost universally. For these many years the sheep bred and fed in *Ulster*, are neither sufficient to supply their markets with food, nor the inhabitants with wool for cloathing and other uses; they generally buy wool in the other provinces to supply the fairs in *Ulster*, for the use of the inhabitants; and the butchers go frequently out of the province to buy fat sheep for the market.

THE counties of *Donnegal*, *Derry*, *Tyrone* and *Antrim*, were never properly sheep countries, great part of them being mountainy, and the low grounds being too moist; and the sheep there are neither so large nor their fleeces so good as those in the richer and dryer lands in the other provinces. However, formerly they had more sheep than fed and cloath'd the inhabitants, and had a wool-port at *Ballintray*, now disus'd, from whence they exported their wool to *England*. But now since the increase of our numbers, and the employment of our hands in the linnen-manufacture, they want wool from the other provinces, and the people there, and thro' the whole province, buy their stuffs and cloths in *Dublin*, to cloath most of the inhabitants. The counties of *Fermanagh*, *Monaghan*, and *Cavan*, have now no more sheep than are sufficient to supply themselves and the neighbouring counties in *Ulster*, tho' part of the counties of *Monaghan* and *Cavan* were formerly sheep countries. *Fermanagh* being not proper for sheep, employs its ground in rearing and feeding black cattle; *Monaghan* and *Cavan* being now enter'd upon the linnen-manufacture, employ great part of their labour in flax and spinning, which occasions more land to be till'd as their numbers increase. The counties of *Armagh* and *Down*, tho' formerly in part proper for sheep, yet now by increase of their numbers employ'd in linnen, are become corn countries to supply their inland towns with provisions; and the sea-coast of the county of *Down*, by the improvement of its lands by marle, supplies *Dublin* with grain, where they have a constant market. Thus it is plain, that the whole province of *Ulster* has not sheep or wool sufficient for its own consumption; and *Louth*
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in *Leinster*, which was formerly all under sheep, has not enough at this time to supply the demands of *Ulster*, without taking in some of the neighbouring counties to its assistance. *Drogheda*, which was formerly a great market for wool, where merchants made fortunes by exporting it to *England*, scarcely now sends any thing to *England* but linnen yarn; the face of trade being so much alter'd in 30 years: Most of the other counties in *Leinster* have also plough'd up their sheep-walks; *Meath* is now entirely under tillage and cattle; the counties of *Dublin*, *Kildare* and *Wicklow* are under tillage and dairies; *King's* and *Queen's* counties, *Wexford* and *Kilkenny* have few or no sheep, except some skirts that lie near *Carlow* and *Westmeath*, which are sheep counties; tho' in those also the sheep seem to be decreasing, for in *Carlow* they are setting up the linnen-manufacture, which in some time will lessen the sheep-walks. *Westmeath*, by being a neighbour to the spinning counties, is also falling into the linnen manufacture, and *Longford* is already employ'd in it, and its land in tillage and grazing cattle; so that only two counties in *Leinster*, *Carlow* and *Westmeath* can be call'd sheep counties.

IN *Connaught*, the counties of *Sligo* and *Leitrim* are not proper for sheep, being coarse and wet, and are employ'd in tillage and grazing black cattle; so that only *Roscommon*, with part of *Galway* and *Mayo*, are sheep counties in that province; and in *Mayo* the manufacture of linnen is beginning to increase as well as in other parts of *Connaught*: This will gradually lessen their sheep-walks, as their numbers increase, by having employment, and more lands being necessary to be under grain to maintain them.

IN *Munster*, the counties of *Waterford*, *Kerry* and *Clare* are mountainous, and not fit for sheep; and the greatest part of the counties of *Cork* and *Limerick* are employ'd in tillage, in feeding cattle, and of late very much laid out in dairy farms; so that only *Tipperary* in *Munster* can be call'd a sheep county, and there the number of sheep is much lessen'd. The skirts of the counties of *Cork* and *Limerick*, which were formerly under sheep, are now chang'd into dairy farms; for by a faithful and correct return made by gentlemen from that county, to the chairman of the
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the woollen committee in parliament, it appears, that within these 14 years, in a small district of four miles in the county of *Limerick*, the sheep were lessen'd in number about 17600, and in the barony of *Lower Conellough*, they have decreased in that time from 39100 to 7260. In the county of *Cork*, in the baronies of *Orrery* and *Kilmore*, *Duballow* and *Farmoy*, in that time they have decreased from 72100 to 17270; in most other places they have decreased to one third or fourth of their former number, which has been occasion'd by setting their lands to dairy-men, and to those who feed black cattle.

IN *Tipperary*, by the account given by the gentlemen of that county, the sheep are much decreas'd, and they have begun to feed black cattle, and to till the lands there; and this seems agreeable to an extract I took lately from the hearth-money books, where I find that the number of houses in *Tipperary* in 1730, were 2647 more than in 1725; in the county of *Cork* there were 1309 more; and in the county of *Limerick* 478; which must be occasion'd by the lessening their sheep-walks, and turning their lands to other uses. The account given of *Galway* was also to the same purpose, that their sheep was in most places lessen'd in number, and their lands otherwise employ'd.

THUS it appears plainly, that the only counties in *Ireland* in which there are considerable flocks of sheep, are *Tipperary*, *Galway*, *Mayo*, *Roscommon*, *Carlow* and *Westmeath*, and one with another not half of these are employ'd that way, so that there are not fully three counties in *Ireland* employ'd in grazing sheep.

BY this our brethren in *England* may see, that if prudent methods are taken, *Ireland* in a little time will have no more wool or woollen manufacture, than is necessary for its home consumption; and tho' it is not to be deny'd, that small quantities of wool and its manufactures are clandestinely exported, yet it does not go in such quantity as has been imagin'd from the decrease of the export of wool, and of woollen and bay yarn to *England*. At the same time the people of *Ireland* may see, that tho' some few persons may gain by the running of wool, &c. to *France*, *Spain* or *Portugal*, yet that this branch of trade

trade is not worth countenancing, much less the struggling for, or upon that account breaking the good correspondence which we have enjoy'd of late with our friends in *Britain*, so long as they indulge us in the linnen and hempen manufactures; in which we may fully employ our poor, at as good wages as they can have by the spinning of wool; and at the same time we are sure of an open and constant market for the whole quantity of those manufactures which all the poor of this kingdom can furnish.

I HAVE thus endeavour'd to shew how little of the kingdom is employ'd under sheep, and that even the greatest part of the wool is necessary to employ the clothiers in *Dublin*, who supply most part of the kingdom with woollen goods; nor has it been ever known that any clandestine woollen trade has been carry'd on at that port. It is also certain, that most of the woollen and bay yarn spun in the west, as well as a great quantity from *Dublin*, is exported to *England*; so that the only woollen goods clandestinely exported, are some from the manufactory establish'd at *Cork*, which also supplies many places in that neighbourhood with cloathing. Now whether the quantity of woollen goods exported from thence, and the gain made by half a score merchants and clothiers there, be worth contesting, either on the one side or the other, I leave to the judgment of any who are indifferent and unprejudiced, either in *England* or *Ireland*.

By putting the laws already enacted in execution, (which are as severe as the nature of the crime will allow, for were it capital, I'm of opinion fewer would be convicted than even now are) the inconveniencies attending that clandestine trade would be so great, that the merchant would not find his account in that branch of trade; and since it may be easily made appear that every person now concerned in the sheep-grounds, the wooll and the manufacture made of it, would make as great profit of their lands and labours, by falling into the linnen and hempen manufactures, which would improve gradually as greater numbers were employ'd in them; Is it not then the common interest of *Britain* and *Ireland* to promote the establishing these manufactures as soon as possible in the

west? This seems to be the most prudent method to gain the end so much to be desired, of preventing the clandestine woollen trade; and the transition from spinning of wooll to spinning of hemp and flax will be easy.

I AM glad to find that the gentlemen in the west do come into this way of thinking; for the great demand there is at present from thence for flax seed, is a plain indication of it; the county of *Cork* having demanded 2437 barrels, (which is about half the quantity the trustees of the linnen board, by their small fund, have been able to procure from abroad) and the whole province of *Munster* having this year demanded 3648 barrels.

By their coming into and promoting the sowing of hemp and flax, they will have the immediate profit of the seed, and of the raw and dressed flax; which will be taken from them by the people in the north, there being generally a great quantity of each imported to supply the farmers and spinners there: And when they have the primums of these manufactures, they will soon teach their idle poor, as well as those who have already learned to spin wooll, to spin hemp and flax, to which the trustees of the linnen board will contribute by furnishing them with proper wheels for spinning flax, and reels to make the yarn statutable and proper for sale. By this means the number of the industrious will increase, and more lands be employ'd in tillage and feeding cattle for their sustenance, so that gentlemen finding they can lett their lands to advantage, and have thriving villages, and have well-paid rents, will soon break up their sheep-walks. Thus by an easy, prudent method, our brethren in *England* will gain their end, and the poor of *Ireland* will be as well employ'd as they are at present.

WOULD it not also be a proper encouragement, if the 5s. per hogthead premium, given now by law to the importer of foreign flax and hemp-seed, were extended to those in this kingdom, particularly in the west, who would save their seed, by stacking their flax and hemp, and threshing it out in the proper season? for by this means our own people would keep that money in the kingdom which is now given to foreigners, by buying so much foreign seed, which would

would then be saved to the publick, by having it equally good at home. The trustees may also give a further premium, instead of buying foreign flax-seed, and by this means furnish such provinces as want seed, with their own at a moderate value.

CONSIDERING also, that upon repeated trials, our *Irish* sail-cloth has out-worn *Holland* duck, even in *East-India* voyages, it would seem to be the interest of *England* to give a small premium for *Irish* sail-cloth imported to *Britain*, and to take from us what we could make for some years for the use of the navy; for it was upon account of our not having a ready market for it, as well as upon account of our not having enough of the materials to work upon, that this manufacture is now at a stand here, after having been assisted and supported many years by the linnen board: Whether this would not be more beneficial to *England*, by speedily throwing us out of the woollen trade, and less expensive to them, than sending owlers to prevent our clandestine trade, they are the best judges.

THE house of commons has already shewed its resentment against the promoters of this clandestine trade, by coming into vigorous resolutions against the runners of wooll; and it may be presumed that they will think it yet proper to address his Grace to have the laws put in execution against them; and I'm convinc'd every gentleman in the kingdom will do his utmost to prevent a trade so destructive to the joint interest of both kingdoms; and also to promote the increase of the linnen manufacture in the west, and in those counties where it has not yet obtained, as the best method to prevent it: In like manner we may hope that the trustees of the linnen board, who have hitherto acted with so much integrity and vigour, in extending this manufacture over the whole kingdom, will promote its increase in the west as soon as possible, with their utmost ability: And I think this is the utmost can be done by the people of *Ireland* to convince our friends in *England* that we fully design to prevent the clandestine woollen trade; for should we go further, and stop our manufacturers in the west at once, it would have the same fatal effect as when our woollen manufacture was at first prohibited to be exported; for by stopping it at once, we should lose the hands employ'd in it; they would immediately

go to *France*, *Spain*, or *Portugal*, and improve or establish those manufactures where they have not yet been, which would be equally destructive to *England*, as when those who had before transported themselves to *France* and *Germany*, laid the foundation of, or promoted and improved the woollen manufacture in those parts.

THUS in a few years all the misunderstandings between *England* and *Ireland* about wooll would be prevented, and no more wooll or manufacture made of it would be run abroad; and while *England* continues to give all proper encouragement to our linnen and hempen manufactures, a perfect good correspondence and harmony will be kept up between us, which is absolutely necessary to the well-being of both kingdoms.

THIS is the fullest and best account I can procure of the growth of our wooll, and of the nature of our woollen trade in *Ireland*, which you may plainly see is upon the decline, and that the clandestine trade is by no means so great as has been imagin'd, but is confin'd to a few, and is not of that consequence as to embroil us with *England*. The few observations I have offer'd by you to the publick, and the method proposed of gradually changing our labour from wooll to flax and hemp, seems to me the easiest and most natural way to prevent it, and at the same time to promote our common happiness. This is the view I have in communicating my thoughts to you at present upon this subject, and leave it to your better Consideration.

I am, S I R,

Your most humble Servant,

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HIBERNO-BRITANNUS.

